

OPENING STATEMENT
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U.S. HOUSE SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY HEARING
“Tapping America’s Unconventional Oil Resources for Job Creation and Affordable Domestic
Energy: Technology and Policy Pathways”
April 17, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is an interesting topic for this Committee to examine today. Certainly, the oil and gas sector is one area in which we see how advances in science and engineering can translate into large-scale economic value, and our agencies have played a historic role in unconventional fossil R&D.

But, being an election year and with gas price on their way to new highs, I have little confidence that the discussion will stay within the bounds of our jurisdiction here.

Even as late as a decade ago, we had little idea of the fossil resources that would be available today. But, high energy prices and a healthy dose of geologic luck aligned with some critical research investments made by the Department of Energy over 30 years ago to bring new natural gas online, and with it, oil.

That DOE program wrapped up in the early 90’s when a private company took the research performed by DOE and ran with it to ignite the oil and gas boom we see today. I think my colleagues would agree that that is the model for applied research programs we all hope to see – federal investments shepherding transformational technologies to the marketplace, even when the path is not clear.

But that also begs the question: Being the Science, Space, and Technology Committee, what are we really here to discuss today? After all, it does not get much more commercial, much more profitable, than oil and gas.

At a time of severe fiscal restraint, is it appropriate to talk about expanding the federal role in technology development for the oil and gas industry? What about the fear of government “picking winners and losers”, “crowding out private investment”, or otherwise engaging in market-supported activities that my Republican colleagues are usually so quick to malign cleantech research programs for supposedly perpetrating? How many decades and how many billions of taxpayer dollars can we spend picking the same winners?

If sustained high oil prices are not enough to drive further innovation in unconventional oil, is it really the job of the taxpayer to buy-down the oil industry’s risk? Are billions of taxpayer dollars in subsidies not enough of a handout for the most profitable industry in the world?

Maybe we are here to talk about the importance of oil to the economy. If so, don’t worry, we get that. I am from Dallas, and Democrats drive cars too. Oil and gas will play an important role in our nation’s economy for decades.

The real reason we are here is that it is an election year, and this hearing is another installment in the losing campaign to pin the nation’s escalating gasoline prices on President Obama. To that, I add my

voice to the bipartisan chorus of industry and policy experts that consider that as ridiculous as the notion that we can somehow drill our way into low gas prices and energy independence.

The Republicans multi-million dollar effort to create an alternate reality in which a President controls gas prices is backfiring. The American people are smarter than that, and are coming to appreciate the real cost of our addiction to oil.

Even if the oil comes from your own backyard, you pay the global price. The only guaranteed relief from the pain at the pump is to visit the pump less often. We need more transportation options, with cars and trucks that are dramatically more efficient, more alternative fuels, and more vehicle electrification. The cheapest gas is the gas you don't have to buy.

In closing I would like to dispel the myth that President Obama and the Democrats are mounting a war on fossil fuels. We simply want future generations to have a choice. Where Democrats differ from our Republican counterparts is that we recognize that our nation will be strengthened by diversifying our energy supply and protecting public health, and that is more important than short-term profits of industry. The oil will be there. It is up to the markets to make the price right, and the industry to make sure it can be produced sustainably.

Thank you, and I yield back.